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Monographs on Missions

Prot. Episc. Church in U.S.A.

I. The Canal Zone

The first Church work on the Isthmus was begun by Americans in 1855; Christ Church, Colon, a large stone structure built in that year, cost $65,000, but when the plans for the building of the canal collapsed, Americans left the Isthmus, a Colombian revolution broke out, and the church building, which still stands, was used as an arsenal, a fort, a powder magazine and for various other purposes.

In 1883 the English Church established the episcopate of British Honduras, which included a general responsibility for Central America. The American workers on the canal were mostly West Indian Negroes and of the Anglican Communion, and the English Church went to take care of her own. Christ Church, Colon, was gladly turned over, other missions were opened and sustained through spasmodic attempts at building the canal, up to 1907, when, on the purchase of the Canal Zone by the United States, the English Church transferred the work to us. This transfer included much more territory than the actual strip—ten miles wide and forty-five long—which our Government purchased. In all, it is an area of 500,000 square miles, with 200,000 population. English influence in

Central America has been waning for some time, while American interests have advanced, and the English Church is now debating the wisdom of surrendering to us practically all of Central America as soon as we can take it over. This is the logical and proper thing to do, because we can more easily carry on the work.

The work in the Canal Zone has certain unique features:

1. It is a *co-operative work.* It has manifested the highest genius of domestic missions. Domestic missions should not be regarded merely as an attempt to propagate the Episcopal Church. Co-operation of the Church with the State in creating a Christian civilization should be their object. The State goes to undertake a tremendous task for the whole world—a great canal to shorten the lines of traffic and draw the ends of the earth together—and the Church goes also. Throughout the whole building of the canal, the State and the Church have worked together to build up morals and religion, as well as to make locks and waterways. The Government has treated the building of the canal as a great and noble enterprise, and has realized that the worker has his rights and interests; that he must have a chance for health and comfort, for education and religion. This is one of the best examples of what an army is good for. As American citizens, we rejoice in it, and are glad that the Church also has had its part in the work.

2. There has been another distinctive feature about this work. *It was temporary,* and was understood to be so. But it was worth while. We are apt to think that we

should not spend time and money where there is no chance of permanency; yet here was a work which was temporary in its very nature. At one time (some four years ago) we had twenty-five stations in the Canal Zone; probably seventeen of these are now under water. There are now only eight stations and four clergy. The 34,000 people who lived there during the construction of the canal have gone home. But both they and we are stronger and better because the beneficent task of a Christian nation was Christianly accomplished.

3. The Canal Zone speaks not only of a good work done, but of a larger work that may be done. With the exception of Costa Rica, the political and religious conditions of the Central American Republics are deplorable. In going to the Canal Zone we have become neighbors to many thousands of heathen people. I think the Church was taken down there that she might see the crying need of the peoples of Central America. Even that which passes for Christianity is probably the lowest type which has ever been produced by the Roman Church. The president of one of the Central American republics actually built a temple to a heathen god and caused the rites of that god to be performed, in the midst of what was supposed to be a Christian community. Frederick Palmer has written a very interesting book about these conditions — "Central America and Its Problems" (See also article by Mr. Palmer in THE SPIRIT OF MISSIONS for May, 1911, page 389). He was very urgent upon his return from that region that something be

done, and the matter has been discussed, but nothing has resulted.

The work in the Canal Zone in the past is small compared to what it will become in the future. Panama will some day be one of the world's great shipping centers. It is already one of the greatest of our military garrisons. Eventually it will also be a great ecclesiastical center from which the Church will carry on a continent-wide work.

Copies of this leaflet may be obtained from The Literature Department, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York, by asking for 575.

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